

# Prophecy

## God's Purposes

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:3 NIV). The NASB translates "the worlds were prepared by the word of God" (:3). God's command is equivalent to the word of God. Words are spoken. "The Lord God commanded the man [Adam], 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden'" (Ge 2:16). Adam's choice was not limited. However, a command is an authoritative instruction which likely contains a consequence for not following the directive. Therefore God explained, "You must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you shall surely die" (:16).

God told Isaiah, "I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Isa 46:9-10). "Behold, the former things have come to pass, now I declare new things; before they spring forth I proclaim them to you" (42:9). What God plans happens. He predicts future events. "Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it" And you are My witnesses" (44:8). Daniel exclaimed, "Wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs" (Da 2:20-21). "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things" (:22). Are there alternatives? "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me" (Isa 44:6). "The King of Jacob says. Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place" (41:22). "Surely there was no one who declared" (:26).

## Go, I am with you

God instructed Adam. He also said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people" (Ge 6:13) "so make yourself an ark of cypress wood" (:14). Furthermore God said, "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark" (:17). "Noah did everything just as God commanded him" (:22) and he and his family were saved. They were obedient to God's commands. But during the period of the judges "unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands" (Jdg 2:17). There are consequences to disobedience. However, God eventually puts an end to suffering as "when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord on account of Midian, the Lord sent a prophet to the sons of Israel" (6:7-8). Also, the Lord told Moses, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt . . . [and] am concerned about their suffering" (Ex 3:7). "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians" (:8).

In the first case the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon while he was "beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites" (Jdg 6:11). Gideon responded saying, "Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?" (:13). "The Lord looked at and said, 'Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?' (:14). He also stated, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man" (:16). Gideon's strengths were that he was working in adverse circumstances and he believed that God had delivered Israel from Egypt. Also when he "saw that he was the angel of the Lord, he said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face'" (:22).

In the second case "the angel of the Lord appeared to him [Moses] in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush" (Ex 3:2). "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" (:4). "Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God" (:6). Then God said, "So now, go. I am sending you to Paraoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (:10). "But Moses said to God, 'Who am I?'" (:11) "and God said, 'I will be with you'" (:12). "Go" is a green light, and when God works with you it will be a success.

## **Mt. Sinai**

Initially "the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Ex 33:11). God said, "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord" (Nu 12:8). But God would also address Israel as a group. He told Moses "let them be ready for the third day, for . . . the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people" (Ex 19:11). The agreement would be "if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, they you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine" (:5). God said, "I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever" (:9). Israel agreed saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (:8). Then when the third day came "there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound" (:16). "Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (:18). "When the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance" (20:18). "Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin'" (:20). Their response was to say to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" (:19). "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven'" (:22). Moses was to later say "the Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire . . . [and] you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain" (Dt 5:4-5). Later God said he would "raise up for

you a prophet like me from among you" (18:15). When Moses referred to a prophet like himself that means he considered himself a prophet. "This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire any more, lest I die'" (:16). God would choose individual prophets in the future like Moses.

## Commissioned

God told Moses, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you" (Dt 18:18). "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets" (1Co 12:28). "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets" (Eph 4:11). He raised up Isaiah when he "heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'" (Isa 6:8). Isaiah replied, "Here am I. Send me!" (:18). God answered, "Go, and tell this people" (:9). God also sent Jeremiah saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). To Ezekiel God said, "Son of Man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel" (Ezek 2:3). Amos said, "The Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel'" (Amos 7:15). Amos stated "surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (3:7). Uriah was "a man who prophesied in the name of the Lord" (Jer 26:20). "Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke by the commission of the Lord to the people" (Hag 1:13).

Prophets didn't just say anything they felt like. "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2Pe 1:21). "All scripture is inspired by God" (2Ti 3:16) which includes the prophecies in scripture. God told Ezekiel "whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from me" (Ezek 3:17). Furthermore "when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'" (:27). "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah . . . saying, 'Go and speak'" (Jer 28:13). The Hebrew word for prophesy (nabi) means to freely speak the message of God from a full heart which contains it. "Every word of God is tested . . . [so] do not add to His words" (Pr 30:5-6). The prophet does not compose a presentation from his own imagination. God asks, "Who is blind but My servant, or so deaf as My messenger whom I send?" (Isa 42:19). Moses prophecys, "I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (Dt 18:18). God told Jeremiah, "Everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak" (Jer 1:7).

## Authenticity

Prophecy is communication which is essential to a relationship. One reason God uses prophecy is to prove that the Bible is genuine since it is "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5). "When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent" (Jer 28:9). "Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Jos 21:45). However, the question is, "If a prophet . . . gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes true" (Dt 13:1-2) is it automatically valid? It could still be idolatry. In that case "God is testing you" (:3). The purpose is that, "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him" (:4). The major prophets were sent to Israel. Once Isaiah was told to "comfort My people . . . [and] speak kindly to Jerusalem" (Isa 4:1-2). "One who prophesies edifies the church" (1Co 14:4). But Israel's problem was that "My people do not know the ordinance of the Lord" (Jer 8:6). "The lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie" (:8). Also, God pointed out that there were "prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them" (14:15). "They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord" (23:16). "The prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously . . . [or] speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die" (Dt 18:20).

The most common understanding regarding prophecy is that it predicts the future. That would require supernatural insight available only from God. Daniel told the king, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Da 2:28). John wrote of "the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place" (Rev 1:1). The Hebrew words ro'eh and hozeh refer to revelations which only the anointing quickens that ordinarily can't be seen. "The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision" (Da 2:19). Saul's servant said, "There is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; all that he says surely comes true" (1Sa 9:6). "He who is called a prophet now was formerly [in Israel] called a seer" (:9). He could divinely see into the future what God planned to do. Pharaoh stated, "I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (Ge 41:15-16). Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High" (Da 4:24).

## Prophets Spoke

John was told to, "Worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10). God communicates his intentions. "I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness" (Isa 45:23). God appointed

prophets to carry it out "Even as My servant Isaiah" (20:3). "Men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal 2:7). "He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old" (Lk 1:70). "The Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again" (Jer 25:4). They challenged people to trust God. They rebuked sin and called for obedience and repentance. They pronounced judgment. "He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways" (Heb 1:1). "All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days" (Ac 3:24). "It is you who are the sons of the prophets" (:25).

"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry" (1Pe 1:10). Jesus said, "From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He" (Jn 13:19). On the road to Emmaus "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the scriptures" (Lk 24:27). Later he said, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (:44). "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Ac 10:43). "We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention" (2Pe 1:19). However, Jesus observed, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken" (Lk 24:25).

## **The Prophet**

Moses prophesied, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you" (Dt 18:15). "I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him" (:18). In his second sermon Peter quoted, "It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him" (:19). Israelites were taught the Torah in the temple. They asked John the Baptist, "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No" (Jn 1:21). "They asked him, 'Why are you baptizing, if you are not . . . the Prophet?'" (:25). Jesus raised a dead man to life and he exclaimed, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" (Lk 7:16). "The people saw the sign [of feeding the 5000] which He had performed . . . [and said] 'this is of a truth the Prophet who is come into the world'" (Jn 6:14). "The multitudes were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee'" (Mt 21:11). He is "Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of all people" (Lk 24:19).

A valid prophecy should be accepted and a bonafide prophecy would pass judgment. "When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent" (Jer 28:9). But what about future, unfulfilled prophecies? When Moses prophesied, "I will raise up a prophet from your countrymen

like you" (Dt 18:18) it was considered that this person would be the Messiah. That is why they asked John, "Are you the prophet?" (Jn 1:21). Prophecies pointed to the coming Messiah. "Of the fruit of your [David's] body I will set upon the throne" (Ps 132:11) and "He will reign as King" (Jer 23:5). "One will go forth for Me to be ruler of Israel" (Micah 5:2) and "Your throne shall be established forever" (2Sa 7:16). "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace" (Isa 9:7). The woman of Samaria said, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ)" (Jn 4:25). That is why the high priest asked, "Are You the Christ?" (Mk 14:61). In Nazareth they asked, "Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers?" (Mt 13:55). They did not believe who he was and Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town" (:57).

## Thoughts in the Night

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and took captives to Babylon. Some were chosen who had ability to serve in the king's court. They were to receive three years of training and directed to eat and drink the king's provisions. But Daniel didn't want to defile himself so he requested vegetables instead. In the New Testament they wrote "that they abstain from things contaminated by idols" (Ac 15:20). They were tested in this for ten days and "at the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter" (Da 1:15). Furthermore, "God gave them knowledge and intelligence . . . [and] Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams" (:17). When they entered the king's personal service "he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm" (:20). Then "Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him" (2:1) and he asked his soothsayer priests, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to explain them saying, "My spirit is anxious to understand the dream" (:3). When his wise men couldn't provide an answer he ordered them killed. Daniel asked the captain of the king's bodyguard about this and "Arioch informed Daniel about the matter" (:15). Then Daniel asked the king to give him time to respond (:16). Daniel then told his friends "so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery" (:18). Daniel took the initiative to talk to the king and to ask God for an answer. "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

"Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision" (Da 2:19). Daniel thanked God saying, "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king's matter" (:23). Jesus said, "All things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Mt 21:22). Daniel told the king that it had been revealed "for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, that you may understand the thoughts of your mind" (:30). Daniel cited that the king's

“thoughts [had] turned to what would take place in the future” (:29) and that God had made known “what will take place in the latter days” (:28). Unbeknownst to them, the latter days would be farther in the future than they knew. Later Daniel said, “I heard but could not understand; so I said, 'My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?' He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time” (12:8-9). God had chosen to give Nebuchadnezzar dreams and Daniel was present to interpret them. God thereby recorded it in the Bible “to seal up vision and prophecy” (9:24).

## **Daniel's Night Vision**

The king had his dream in the second year of his reign (Da 2:1). “Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the King” (1:21). He recognized God, saying, “It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings” (2:21). He told the king about the large statue he saw standing in front of him which appeared “awesome” (:31). The word is from 'dehal' which means “to fear” which is perhaps why the king was “troubled” (:1). Daniel explained, “The head of that statue was made of fine gold” (:32) which gave it “extraordinary splendor” (:31). Since it was a statue of a man it describes something about man, himself, and his activity in history. “Its breast and its arms [were] of silver, its belly and its thighs [were] of bronze, its legs [were] of iron, [and] its feet [were] partly of iron and partly of clay” (:32-33).

Daniel interpreted to the king that he was the “head of gold” (:38). He explained that “the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory . . . [and living things] into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all” (:37-38). Then he interpreted, “After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth” (:39). He continued saying, “There will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron” (:40) and “in that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom” (:41). Since it is strong like iron “it will crush and break all these [previous kingdoms] in pieces” (:40). Also, “As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery” (:42) “it will have in it the toughness of iron” (:41) “and part of it will be brittle” (:42). Furthermore, “They will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another , even as iron does not combine with pottery” (:43).

## **Awesome Statue**

Daniel interpreted the dream “before the king” (Da 2:36). The current kingdom was described as ruling “over them all” (:39). Then a second kingdom will take over which is “inferior to you” (:40). The first was of “fine gold” (:32) but the second of “silver” was not as valuable. Perhaps its being “inferior” (:39) was better understood in their own

venacular. However, it couldn't have meant militarily weaker because it defeated Babylon. It didn't mean less morally depraved just because Babylon was already "the mother of harlots" (Rev 17:5). Mysticism and idolatry had been practiced earlier in Egypt from 2900-1150 B.C. and in Assyria from 1100-633 B.C. Babylon (626-539 B.C.) continued in "the abominations of the earth" (17:5) with their idols and sacrifices. Additionally, they developed a mystical priesthood and a "mother and her child" religion. However, the king did have "the power, the strength and the glory" (Da 2:37) and ruled "over them all" (:38). He was a dictator with all the authority, whereas the Medo-Persian empire was controlled by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian who had to share the power which made it "more inferior" regarding rulership.

Then Daniel interpreted that "another third kingdom of bronze [would arise], which will rule over all the earth" (2:39). Bronze is lower on the scale of superiority. Theologians have concluded that it referred to Alexander the Great. This kingdom from Greece lasted from 330-30 B.C. But after Alexander conquered the area he died suddenly and four of his generals divided up the region. The Olympics present gold, silver and bronze medals. The third kingdom ruled "over all the earth" (:39) but its bronze status caused by power being diluted by the four rulers gave it a lower political score. The "fourth kingdom as strong as iron . . . crushes and shatters all things" (:40). Conquering empires tend to absorb the cultures of those they overcome and are tolerant to varying degrees. But this one will "break all these [previous ones] in pieces" (:40). Theologians believe that this kingdom is represented by the Roman Empire. It seems logical to conclude that the iron legs were the western zone headquartered in Rome and the eastern in Constantinople. But politically Rome had an emperor, senate and representatives. It took more effort to arrive at a consensus, so its power structure was not as concentrated as that of the upper levels of the statue. Rome was in power from 30 B.C. to 476 A.D. Babylon essentially wasted away by 280 B.C.

## **Statue Destroyed**

Daniel described a fourth kingdom which was very strong because it was made of iron (Da 2:40). But its feet and toes were susceptible since they were a mixture of iron and clay. The Romans had a form of mortar they built with but it is doubtful that the iron was rebar since it was "mixed" (:41) and the clay was "pottery" (:42). It speaks of the kingdom being "divided" (:41) where part of it "will be strong and part of it will be brittle" (:42). The Romans subjugated many nations which were combined "in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another" (:43) because they are dissimilar. At that time God instigated a plan. Daniel prophesied that, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed" (:44). Nebuchadnezzar had seen "that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold" (:45). "It became like chaff . . . and the wind



carried them away . . . [and] the stone . . . became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (:35).

It's not surprising that Daniel had another dream in "the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon" (Da 7:1) because even Jesus spoke of him as "Daniel the prophet" (Mt 24:15). You might say that it reinforced the meaning of the dream Nebuchadnezzar had. Daniel saw the "four winds of heaven churning up the great sea" (Da 7:2) which is the sea of humanity producing activity. A beast "like a lion" (:4) came up. A beast is symbolic of a government. Beasts can be ferocious which would make that government totalitarian and warlike. It had the "wings of an eagle" (:4) which a study Bible says represents "cherubim . . . [which] guard the way to the tree of life" (Ge 3:24). There were statues of winged lions that stood guard at entrances to palaces and temples in ancient Mesopotamia. Then "its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it" (Da 7:4). It symbolized Babylon. The king became prideful and God declared, "Sovereignty has been removed from you . . . until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind" (4:31-32). He was "driven away from mankind" (:32) and seven periods of time passed until the kingdom was restored to him and the king thereby proclaimed, "He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (:37).

### **Four Beasts from Sea**

Daniel received the interpretation that, "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth" (Da 7:17). The second beast "looked like a bear . . . [and] was raised up on one of its sides" (:5). It is said that the Persians had a greater influence in the Medo-Persian federation. God "says of Cyrus [the king], 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all I please'" (Isa 44:48). The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4) authorized the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem leading to the restoration of the city. It had three ribs in its teeth and "was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'" (:5). The empire defeated these nations: Lydia (546 B.C.), Babylon (539) and Egypt (525). A third beast like a leopard appeared. "On its back it had four wings like those of a bird" (7:6). Alexander the Great of Greece conquered the region speedily (334-330 B.C.) as symbolized by the "flying leopard." But he died suddenly in 323 B.C. and his four generals divided the region. The beast "had four heads" (:6) and the head is where thinking and decision making occurs. Consequently "dominion was given to it" and it therefore had the authority to exercise its decisions, inherently having control over others' lives as well. Antipater and Cassander took Macedon and Greece, Lysimachus took Thrace and Asia Minor, Seleucus I took Syria, and Ptolemy I took Egypt.

Then a fourth beast arose who was "dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth" (7:7). The fourth kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's statue was

“strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things” (2:40). This beast “devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet” (7:7). “It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns” (:7). The statue had ten toes (2:42). Ten is the number of testing and trials, law and government. Daniel “was contemplating the horns” (7:8). He was told, “As for the horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise” (:24). John was told, “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast” (Rev 17:12-13). Grazing animals have horns whereas predators have teeth and claws. Horns are for protection and used in battles to determine supremacy in the herd. Power struggles can become violent and injuries are common.

## **Horns and Heads**

"Another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems" (Rev 12:3). Diadems are royal headbands which indicate that the wearer has supreme political power in the state. "His tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (:4). Then there was a war in heaven and "the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (:9). “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time” (:12). The crowns on the dragon's seven heads represent the imperial claims the devil has exhibited over the seven kingdoms of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and expected worldwide control. Then "the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore" (13:1) next to the sea of humanity. John "saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names" (:1). Now the crowns are on the horns designating the kings as sovereign. Also, the leaders somehow have irreverent names attached to their heads which reminds of those "given a mark . . . on their forehead . . . [which is] either the name of the beast or the number of his name" (:16-17). Once again John said, "He carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names having seven heads and ten horns" (17:3). It was explained to John that “the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits” (:9). A study Bible says that Rome was initially composed of settlements on several hills adjacent to the Tiber River which a number of writers later refer to. Others speculate that the Revived Roman Empire will become a stronghold of the Antichrist.

## **Coming Kingdom**

God gave dreams to the king. It's because he wanted to illustrate some parallels and make some pertinent points. Kings rule and reign because they set the rules and

reign over their implementation. They have dominion, sovereign authority and power over a geographical area and in certain other spheres of influence. This would be his kingdom. He was preoccupied with his position and Daniel accordingly interpreted that "the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future" (Da 2:45). The two dreams culminated in renditions of the final makeup of the ultimate kingdom. "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever" (Da 2:44). "Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (7:27). The main characteristic is that it "will never be destroyed . . . [and] will itself endure forever" (:44) and "will be an everlasting kingdom" (:45). An angel speaking of Christ said, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Lk 1:33).

But Jesus didn't just appear out of nowhere. God authored prophecies throughout the Old Testament to delineate his plan to use Jesus to reestablish his kingdom. There is a prophetic connection through King David. Jesus himself said, "I am the root and the descendant of David" (Rev 22:16). An angel told Mary that Jesus "will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Lk 1:32). It was established initially that "the Lord has sworn to David . . . of the fruit of your body I will set upon the throne" (Ps 132:11). Nathan reiterated, "Your throne shall be established forever" (2Sa 7:16). "In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David" (:17). Firstly it was noted that, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Ge 49:10). Furthermore, "One will go forth for Me to be ruler of Israel" (Mic 5:2). Jeremiah prophesied "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king" (Jer 23:5). Isaiah prophesied, "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom" (Isa 9:7). Jesus' disciples knew all these scriptures. They were therefore prompted to ask, "Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?" (Mt 24:3). Jesus listed eight signs (:4-14) and replied, "The day is coming when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about" (:15).

## **Babylon**

### **Lineage of Nations**

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God "the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken" (Ge 3:23). Sin took hold, and

when Cain killed his brother, God told him, "You are cursed from the ground" (4:11). Then Cain settled "east of Eden" (:16) and his wife "gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city" (:17). Sin was still operative as evidenced by Lamech telling his wives, "I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-seven fold" (:23-24). Nonetheless "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (:26). However, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth" (6:5) and said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land" (:7). "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (:8) and "became the father of three sons" Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (:10). God directed Noah to "make for yourself an ark" (:14) because "I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh" (:17).

When the flood subsided God told them, "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood" (9:11). "The Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth'" (8:21). "Noah began farming and planted a vineyard and he drank of the wine and became drunk" (9:20-21). It resulted in an offence made by Ham whereby Noah stated, "Cursed be Canaan" (:25) who was one of the "sons of Ham [who] were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan" (10:6). Some would say a curse would be genealogically inherited. "Cush became the father of Nimrod" (:8) but he was not in the line of Canaan. His name means "strong, valiant, brave." "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord" (:9) which can't be construed as resulting from Noah's curse. "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel . . . in the land of Shinar" (:10) which doesn't mean it was inevitable that he would be the cause of all the world's problems. However, he was the thirteenth generation from Adam and, in the Bible, the number 13 is the number of rebellion.

## **Babylon**

Babylon is the second most mentioned city in the Bible after Jerusalem. Revelation 17-18 deals with its judgment. Babylonia is in Central Asia in the Tigris River valley in present-day Iraq. It was composed of Upper Mesopotamia called Accad and Lower Mesopotamia named Chaldea. Mesopotamia means "between the rivers." The Chaldeans were originally from the salt-marsh area at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. These Sumerians were the areas earliest inhabitants and made huts out of reeds and mud. It was probably the "plain in the land of Shinar" (Ge 11:2) where postdiluvian people settled. It was a very fertile area capable of supporting a large civilization. God told Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (1:28). Also, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (9:1). "It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (11:2).

In Shinar they said to each other, "Let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven" (Ge 11:4). Cain had built cities. Did they feel insecure or powerless? Years ago I purchased a cassette tape by a musical group from the Midwest. On the back of the case they commented that being raised on the Great Plains built "intestinal fortitude" because there were no crutches such as mountains to psychologically depend on. The Hebrew word for tower is "migdal" which refers to an elevated structure providing protection. "There was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower" (Jdg 9:51). The city would have provided unity and purpose and a division of labor promoting efficiency. But the other side of the coin is that they would "make for ourselves a name" (Ge 11:4). That could reflect a need to feed their pride and to subsidize self-sufficiency. God observed that "now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them" (:6). Also they desired to build "a tower whose top will reach into heaven" (:4). That goes beyond the requirement of self-defense and encroaches on divine territory. The serpent deceived Eve arguing when "you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God" (3:5).

## **Tower of Babel**

The postdiluvian people said to themselves let us build "a tower which will reach into heaven" (Ge 11:4). They were the first to repopulate the world after the flood so why would they need defenses from enemies? The heavenly reference is understandable. "Noah lived 350 years after the flood" (9:28) and was 950 years old when he died (:29). The families were living together as "one people, [with] . . . the same language" (11:6). They were familiar with how God rescued them from the flood so why would they need a tower to reach heaven? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe" (Pr 18:10). They didn't want to disband and disperse and "be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Ge 11:4) so a tower would be a symbol of achievement and monument to "make for ourselves a name" (:4). Perhaps the phrase was just a manner of speaking such as there were "great cities fortified to heaven" (Dt 9:1). Some cite how they used to explain the universe. Mountains functioned as supports to the sky and the meeting point was where the gods gathered. On flat lands they built structures as substitutes. The Akkadian word for them was "ziquurratu" meaning "pinnacle, mountaintop, temple-tower." The ziggurat at Babylonia was called "Etemenanki" meaning "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth." God then "confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Ge 11:9). "Therefore its name was called Babel" (:9). The Hebrew translation means "the city of the dispersion of the tribes." The Sumerian name "ka-dingir-ra" means "gate of god." You might say there was both a political and religious basis for the endeavors.

Sin precipitates a propensity in man to depend upon himself. "The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God" (Ps 14:2). One writer explains the height of the tower as being an observatory to study the moon and stars. It becomes an astrological religious substitute leading to occult practices. God saw that "they have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (:3). The Enuma Elish is the Babylonian account of creation. Its mythology relates how gods decide to build a place for King Marduk. Archeologists discovered in Babylon a ceremonial street which led to shrines in a sacred part of the city where there was a 1200x1500 foot court in which was the temple of Marduk and the Tower of Babel. The temple at the bottom was the god's residence. There was also a stairway up the ziggurat to connect the earthly sanctuary to the heavenly pinnacle where there was a shrine to conduct religious rituals. Their literature says "They raised high the head of Esagila equaling Apsu." "Esagila" refers to the abode of the god and "Apsu" is its high, heavenly location. This happened early in Babylon's existence. "Stand fast now in your spells and in your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth" (Isa 47:12). This was a man-made religious system referred to as "Babylon the Great, Mother of All Prostitutes and Obscenities of the World" (Rev 17:5). "Mother" means it is the source of spiritual adultery.

## **Babylon's Deities**

The last book in the Bible is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:1). It is "the testimony of Jesus Christ" (:2) and "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19:19). "Blessed is he who reads . . . and heeds the things which are written in it" (1:3) and "who hears the words of the prophecy of this book" (22:18). When Babylon is referred to it is "the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth" (17:18). It is "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, and of the abominations of the earth" (:5). It must have really been diabolical to deserve that reputation. We know that Nimrod began to build his kingdom in Shinar (Ge 10:10) and went "into Assyria, and built Nineveh and . . . Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city" (:11-12). In Babylonia's infancy in approximately 3500 B.C. Mesopotamia was divided into north and south districts. Sargon of Accad was one of its early kings and he built a large library. After a time the Elamites invaded and controlled the area. Sargon I of Agade (2400 B.C.) began building temples for the gods Anunitum and Amal. The cities had a polytheistic system of recognized gods and each had a patron deity. The god Uruk refers to Nimrod's city Erech (Ge 10:10). One writer notes that early religious practices have no historical documentation. However, others cite that when "the Lord came down to see the city . . . men had built (11:5) he disapproved because he wanted them to disburse and fill the earth. So he "confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad" (:9). Nimrod built a kingdom anyway (Ge 10:10-11) and many interpret it as a rebellion against God. There were religious centers in the cities and each had its

patron deity. A patron is a benefactor who provides support and protection. Politically it was exercised at the institutional or community level, although in some ways, individuals could see it as trickling down to the personal level.

In 2250 B.C. Khammu-rabi drove the Elamites out and the Euphratean states became a united monarchy making Babylon the capital of the kingdom. He began to build more temples but each political district still supported its own deity. However it was his intention to group about twenty of the most important gods into a pantheon which would have more influence. Did kings see consolidation of religious influence as a way to enhance their own potential power? There were gods of the universe: Anu, of the heavens; Enlil, of the earth; and Ea, of subterranean waters. There were astral deities: Shamash, the sun-god; Sin, the moon-god; and Ishtar, goddess of the morning and evening star. The king tried to elevate Marduk, a solar deity (Merodach in Jeremiah 50:2), to prominence by calling him Bel (the Canaanite Baal) meaning "lord" (Isa 46:1; Jer 51:44). There were lesser deities such as Ea, god of craftsmen, and Marduk's son Nabu (Nebo in Isaiah 46:1), god of writing. They were all personifications of existences in the cosmos and nature and gained footholds because of these relationships. Ishtar was popular as the "Queen of Heaven" (Jer 7:18; 44:17-19). She also was remade into the Greek Aphrodite, Roman Venus, and the Canaanite Astarte/Astaroth (Jdg 10:6; 1Sa 7:3-4; 1Ki 11:5). Adad (Canaanite Hadad) was god of storms, and Ninurta (from Assyrian Calah) was god of war and hunting.

## **Babylon's Religion**

Khammurbi designated Babylon as the capital of his empire and wanted the Marduk deity to be its patron god. He therefore desired to group the gods from other cities together to form a pantheon with Marduk as the head. As this developed the traits of his court of gods began to be attributed to the characteristics of Marduk. This centralization reminds one of what a one-world religion would be like. Rewriting of history took place where the incantations for Ea were redone to give Marduk the supreme power over demons, witches and sorcerers. Hymns and lamentations of deities were reattributed to Marduk. The meaning of myths belonging to other deities were redirected to give Marduk the credit. The religious system would then associate with the political system and it would become natural to get people's allegiances to it. Of course, each god had a consort which people could identify with. Then there was a ceremony of installation where a political ruler would "take the hand of Bel" symbolizing a union between the deity of the ruler.

A system of astral theology developed. Heavenly and planetary occurrences were attributed to the gods of those happenings. Of course you had to constantly appease them to ensure they would cooperate. Gods became associated with certain planets.

There was a correspondence between what transpired on the earth and in the stars. It came to pass that the signs in the heavens had to be interpreted to predict what would happen in the future. A class of priests was formed to map out the skies and create myths which would explain things. That elite would possess the wisdom to divine solutions through omens which is akin to the system of astrology we see today. Also the priests themselves developed the systems to conform to the means used to operate them. Religious consolidation was therefore achieved. Incantation processes were implemented to communicate with the gods. Myths and legends promulgated the beliefs. Prayers, sacrifices, rituals and rites put it into practice. The deities' participation resulted in personification where traits such as justice, kindness, or anger were attributed to them. It is no wonder that the Book of Revelation attributes sorcery, harlotry, and idolatry to this.

### **Mother of Harlots**

Someone once coined the phrase "the law of first mention" which says the first time the Bible says something on a subject it establishes a theme to build on. Nimrod "became a mighty one on the earth" (Ge 10:8) who "was a mighty hunter before the Lord" (:9). He was skilled at hunting and accomplishments and was before and not overtly rebelling against God. He started his kingdom (:10) with Babylon but that doesn't make him responsible for everything people in that city later did. "They said to one another, 'Come let us make bricks'" (11:3) and "let us build for ourselves a city" (:4). They discussed it with each other denoting cooperation. God himself was unified when he said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (1:26). However, some criticize because they argued "let us make for ourselves a name" (11:4) which may explain that they were self-centered and seeking power exclusive of God's provision. But God's observation was that they were unified and "nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them" (:6). This was not a direct criticism of a dictatorship set up by Nimrod. Nonetheless, Babylon developed into the "Mother of Harlots" (Rev 17:5).

Nimrod died. Various legends and extra-Biblical sources are cited by authors about his death. It seems that he met a violent death which could be reflective of his ambitions. His wife, Semiramis, was pregnant at the time and it is surmised she was worried about her power and position. When her son, Tammuz, was born she claimed that he was Nimrod reincarnated. Forty days of mourning (weeping) were initiated. Much later Israel continued the false worship of the sun god where Ezekiel was shown at "the entrance of the Lord's house . . . [where] women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz" (Eze 8:14). Also, there were "greater abominations than these" (:15) where they were "prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun" (:16). Spiritual adultery is when you are unfaithful to the God you should worship and serve. Ezekiel prophesied that you "made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them" (16:17). Through Jeremiah God asked, "Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick



darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; will come no more to Thee?'" (Jer 2:31). In Tyre, Isaiah stated that "she will go back to her harlot's wages, and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth" (Isa 23:17). Nineveh was judged "because of the many harlotries of the harlot . . . who sells nations by her harlotries and families by her sorceries" (Nah 2:3). "Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms . . . will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isa 13:19).

Babylon instituted the cult. Archaeologists have discovered Babylonian monuments with the goddess-mother Semiramis and her son in her arms. It was said because of reincarnation that the baby was equal to the father. They began to practice the worship of mother and child. Of course, the birth could not have taken place without the mother, so she was elevated to deity status with the title "the Queen of Heaven." Offerings were made of "cakes for the queen of heaven" (Jer 7:18) and they "were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven" (44:19). Nimrod's death and Tammuz' birth were paired together to represent death and rebirth. The winter solstice means the sun "stands still" on the shortest day of the year and then a year gets "reborn" as the days get longer. Israelite idol worshippers faced "eastward toward the sun" (Eze 8:16). The practice spread to Canaan in 1350 B.C. where Ishtar (Ashtaroth) became the goddess of fertility and Baal her son. "The sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth" (Jud 10:6). The practice spread to other nations. In Egypt it was Isis and Horus, in Greece, Aphrodite and Eros, and in Rome, Venus and Cupid. That is why Babylon is called "the mother of . . . the abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5).

## **Future of Babylon**

John prophesied about the future of Babylon in Revelation chapters 17 and 18. However, Daniel also prophesied regarding Babylon in chapter two. Prophecy often has contemporary application as well as future meaning. In Daniel's case it was that "in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, [the king] had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him" (Da 2:1). Daniel told him that God could provide an explanation saying, "He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place" (:29). He related to the king that "while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future" (:29). He said the answer was so "that you may understand the thoughts of your mind" (:30). The king's initial thoughts were about the future, but he then became concerned about the meaning of the dream.

Daniel began saying, "This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed" (:28). He explained, "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell . . . He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over

them all. You are the head of gold." (:37). Jeremiah had stated, "Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad" (Jer 51:7). Daniel finished saying, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed . . . [and] it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms" (Da 2:44). Jeremiah had also said, "Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! The Lord has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it" (Jer 51:11). "Consecrate the nations against her, the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their prefects, and every land of their dominion" (:28). Because the Medes are cited it shows that the prophecy applies to that current period. Also it cites the time of "in the days of those kings" (:44) and that God would "put an end to all these kingdoms" (:44). Furthermore, Isaiah had said, "Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldean's pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isa 13:19). "It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation" (:20). Jeremiah prophesied, "Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken" (Jer 51:8) and "You will be desolate forever,' declares the Lord" (:26). However, one author believes the prophecy can only pertain to the distant future because Babylon dwindled away over many centuries and wasn't destroyed suddenly according to prophecy. Another teacher says it couldn't refer to a future rebuilt Babylon because scripture says the city would "never be inhabited" (Isa 13:20) and "desolate forever" (Jer 51:26). This person argues that Babylon is symbolic of the economic, political and religious end-time world system because it has all the characteristics of Babylon. However, proper exegesis teaches that you should try to interpret prophecy literally before figuratively. The key could be that it cites the "great city, which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt" (Rev 11:8) as being symbolic because it says so. Therefore, if Babylon is mentioned without being defined as figurative, it should be regarded literally as if it will have been rebuilt in the future to qualify.

## **Valid Worship**

Daniel had told the king "while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future" (Da 2:28) and you "were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. The head of that statue was made of fine gold" (:31-32). Then Daniel interpreted saying to Nebuchadnezzar, "You are the head of gold" (:38). He must have been self-preoccupied. Afterwards "the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon" (3:1). It was then announced that all "peoples, nations and men of every language" (:4) would "fall down and worship the golden image" (:5). He purposed for them to "serve my gods" (:14). But the Jews who refused responded "[it is] 'our God whom we serve'" (:17) and "we are not going to serve your

gods" (:18). However God rescued them "out of the midst of the fire" (:26) because they "put their trust in Him" (:28) and "yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God" (:28). The king concluded "there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (:30).

The king had attempted to force everyone to worship the pagan religions of Babylon which is a precursor to the Antichrist trying to create a one-world religious system. "The great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Rev 12:9). "The dragon stood on the sand of the seashore" (13:1). "Then [John] saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads" (:1). Later John was carried away "in the Spirit into a wilderness; and [he] saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns" (17:3). The beast is a governmental power which comes out of the "sea of humanity." "The dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority" (13:2) and "the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast" (:3). "They worshipped the dragon . . . and they worshipped the beast" (:4). In the gospels "the devil took Him [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and said to Him, 'All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me'" (Mt 3:9). Jesus responded, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord Your God, and serve Him only'" (:10).

## **Rebuilding Prophecies**

Zechariah prophesied that God would restore Jerusalem. He saw "a man with a measuring line in his hand" (Zec 2:1) who answered that he was going "To measure Jerusalem" (:2). God said, "I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst" (:5) and then "you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you" (:11). God told Joshua, "I have taken your iniquity away from you" (3:4) and said, "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day" (:9). Zerubbabel began rebuilding and Zechariah prophesied, "His hands will finish it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you" (:9). God keeps track of progress shown by "the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes" (:9). "These seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel-these are the eyes of the Lord which range to and fro throughout the earth" (4:10). Then Zechariah saw a vision of a flying scroll. An angel explained, "This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land" (5:3) and those who sin "will be purged away" (:3).

Then the prophet had a vision of an "ephah going forth" (5:4). An ephah is a large container for storing grain. The angel explained, "This is their appearance in all the land" (:6). It is a symbol of the sinners who would be purged and the iniquity in the land. Under its lead cover was a woman sitting called "Wickedness" (:8). Then two women with wings

like a stork flew it away (:9). The angel explained they were taking it, "To build a temple for her in the land of Shinar" (:11). After the flood Noah's family "journeyed east [and] found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (Ge 11:2). Its as if the sin which God is purging is being moved to a different place. Furthermore, "When it is prepared, she will be set there on her own pedestal" (Zec 5:11). That would be like an idol in the temple of Babylon. Theologians explain that prophecy can have a current, primary meaning and also a long-term, secondary meaning. Moving the ephah to Babylon could symbolize the rebuilding of that city in the last days so that certain verses in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 50-51 could apply to their fulfillment in Revelation 17-18. Babylon was near the Euphrates River. What kind of lawlessness could originate there? At the sixth trumpet judgment an angel said, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates" (Rev 9:14), and it took place "so that they would kill a third of mankind" (:15). The Euphrates is involved again. "A sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east" (16:12). Wickedness is active there.

## **Abominations of Earth**

Zechariah prophesied from 520-480 B.C. during the rule of the Persian Empire (539-330 B.C.). It was during the period of the restoration of Jerusalem after Babylon (626-539 B.C.) had fallen. He saw a vision of a woman sitting inside of an ephah called "Wickedness" (Zec 5:8). She was then transported so they could "build a temple for her in the land of Shinar" (:11). Shinar is the same area that Babylon had occupied, and of course, Babylon had been conquered and no longer existed as such. A woman again is prophetically mentioned by John who "saw a woman sitting a scarlet beast" (Rev 17:3) and "on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, 'Babylon the Great'" (:5). An angel explained, "The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth" (:18). Is this the same woman from Zechariah? Peter said, "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2Pe 1:20) so the meaning would have to be provided "by the Holy Spirit [who] spoke from God" (:21). We know that she is "the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5). Just as Zechariah said the woman in the ephah was called "Wickedness" (Zec 5:8) so Isaiah spoke of Babylon saying, "You felt secure in your wickedness" (Isa 47:10).

Wickedness means spiritual adultery or idol worship. Ezekiel confronts an "adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!" (Eze 16:32). God acknowledged the relationship saying, "I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine" (:8). But God charged Israel saying, "Yet in this your fathers have blasphemed Me by acting treacherously against Me" (20:27). In the land God gave them "they saw every high hill and every leafy tree, and they offered their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering" (:28). "The things

which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1Co 10:20). God said, "You also took your beautiful jewels . . . which I had given you, and made for yourselves male images that you might play the harlot with them" (Eze 16:17). Babylon is "the mother of harlots" (Rev 17:5). God also pointed out, "You took your sons and daughters . . . and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter?" (Eze 16:20).

God then asked, "Will you defile yourselves after the manner of your fathers and play the harlot after their detestable things?" (20:30). Detestable things are spoken of as idols or abominations. Babylon is the source of "the abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5). If something is detestable it is intensely disliked. If it is abominable it is highly detasteful and offensive. It was predicted they'd say, "We will be like the nations, like the tribes of the lands, serving wood and stone" (Eze 20:32). "The great harlot [is one] who sits on many waters" (Rev 17:1) and the angel said "the waters . . . are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" (:15). Nineveh was "the charming one, the mistress of sorceries" (Nahum 3:4). But God warned Babylon, "Evil will come on you which you will not know how to charm away" (Isa 47:11). God notes Babylon saying, "I am, and there is no one besides me" (:8), "No one sees me" (:10), and "I will be queen forever" (:7). The church of Laodicea said, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17). God challenges them to, "Stand fast in your spells and in your sorceries with which you have labored from your youth" (Isa 47:12). But God concludes that disaster "will come on you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries, in spite of the great power of your spells" (:9).

## **Time of Tribulation**

### **Seven-sealed Scroll**

God, the Father, gave Jesus Christ information about "things which must soon take place" (Rev 1:1) which constitutes a revelation because it is not something which has been heretofore shared. They are "the words of the prophecy" (:3) "which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants" (:1). Since Christ told John, "Write in a book what you see" (:11) we are to "heed the things which are written in it" (:3). When Christ received the revelation "He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John" (:1) who said "I heard behind me a loud voice" (:10). When he looked behind him he saw "one like a son of man" (:13) and then "fell at His feet like a dead man" (:17). The personage replied, "I am the first and the last, and the living One" (:17-18). He had said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (:8). Since the voice John heard was the ascended and glorified Christ and it was spoken "by His angel" (:1) then it is his one-and-the-same supernatural, spiritual

presence. That doesn't mean that an unbeliever can't read it, but does it mean that that person will understand that "every eye will see Him . . . and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him"? (:7).

The scene is around God's heavenly throne where the elders say, "Worthy are You . . . for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created" (Rev 4:11). Then John saw "in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written in the inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals" (5:1). After the Lamb took the book they said, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals, for you were slain, and purchased [men] for God with Your blood" (:9). It was "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Ac 20:28). After Pentecost "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (2:47). He "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession (Titus 2:14). The starting point for all this is that "the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). God explained to the Israelites that, "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me. Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land" (Lev 25:23-24). Boaz' close relative told him, "You may have my right of redemption" (Ruth 3:6) and therefore Boaz told the elders, "You are witnesses today that I have bought" the land (:9). "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess" (:10) who became part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Consequently Christ paid the ransom for us "having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12) making him "the mediator of a new covenant . . . since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions" (:15). "A covenant is valid only when men are dead" (:17).

## **The First Seal**

In Israel when property was purchased it was recorded in a scroll. Jeremiah was told to, "Buy for yourself my field . . . for you have the right of redemption to buy it" (Jer 32:7). He said, "I signed and sealed the deed, and called in witnesses" (:10). Then if the originator of the covenant dies, the will/deed is opened and the instructions in it are executed to fulfill the inheritance. "In the right hand of Him who sat on the throne [was] a scroll" (Rev 5:1). But it was "like the words of a sealed book, which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, 'Please read this,' he will say, 'I cannot, for it is sealed'" (Isa 29:11). Then a disconsolate John was told "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals" (:5). There were sticks on both ends of the scroll, and as the scribe recorded the document, it would be rolled and sections would be sealed with a clay marker having an authentic mark put on it so that only a person with a matching signet ring would be permitted to open the seal. Then "He came and took the [seven-sealed] book out of the right hand of Him who

sat on the throne" (:7). He received the title deed to the earth and would proceed with its redemption and to repossess all that is his.

John "saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals" (Rev 6:1). He was the center of attention as the kinsman-redeemer as he broke the seals, however, the title deed of the earth wasn't a description of his inheritance, but rather describing the process of events involved in reclaiming what was his through a series of judgments. Each step is announced by one of the living creatures for something to take place. Firstly, a white horse appeared and "he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (:2). "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord" (Pr 21:31). "The day of the Lord is coming" (Joel 2:1) and "there is a great and mighty people" (:2). "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run" (:4). "The Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2Ki 6:17).

## **The White Horse**

This horse was white. That color has an association with God and Christ was worthy "to receive glory and honor and power" (Rev 5:11) which originates from the "great white throne and Him who [sits] upon it" (20:11). "Thrones were set up, and the ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool" (Da 7:9). White is also associated with holiness and righteousness. "It was given to her [the bride] to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:8). Isaiah prophesied, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow" (Isa 1:18). David prayed, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps 51:7). Daniel was told, "Many will be purged, purified and refined" (Da 12:10). There was a multitude "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes" (Rev 6:9) who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (:14).

There was a rider on the white horse who had "a bow, and a crown" (Rev 6:1) but it doesn't say that he was wearing white clothes. The crown in Greek is the word *stephanos* and its shape is that of the garland or wreath which is given as a victor's crown for a prize having won an athletic contest. It could also be a token of public honor as an emblem for a military victory. The rider "went out conquering and to conquer" (:2) which has to do with overcoming and prevailing over your enemies. But sitting on a white cloud "was one like a son of man having a golden crown on His head" (14:14). Even later John "saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war . . . and on His dead are many diadems" (19:11-12). However, the *stephanos* which the rider on the horse wore "was

given to him" (6:2) as a reward for a worldly achievement and it was not a royal crown which bonifide kings wore. God controls what happens by giving certain authority but draws the line where "they were not permitted to kill anyone" (9:5). A key . . . was given to him" (:1) and "power was given them" (:3). "There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words" (13:5) and "to make war with the saints and to overcome them" (:7). There were "signs which it was given him to perform" (:14) and "it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast" (:15). Jesus warned, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" (Mt 24:4-5). "False Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (:24).

## Four Horses

The rider on the white horse already "had a bow" (Rev 6:2) and it didn't have to be given to him. The bow is an instrument of war but is more like artillery being shot from a distance as opposed to close quarters fighting as with using a "great sword" (:4) which the next rider on the red horse used. Habakkuk questioned God's tactics "that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation?" (Hab 3:8). "Your bow was made bare, the rods of chastisement were sworn" (:9). "If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready. He has also prepared for Himself deadly weapons; He makes His arrows fiery shafts" (Ps 7:12-13). "Your arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under You" (45:5). Elisha prophesied, "The Lord's arrow of victory" (2Ki 2:17). "He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver" (Isa 49:2). But the rider of the white horse had no quiver of arrows so how could he go forth to conquer? It has been suggested that this is a bloodless conquest achieved through diplomacy. "He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week" (Da 9:27). The emphasis is on "conquering and to conquer" (Rev 6:2). It is a worldwide movement promoting peace because the next rider "was granted to take peace from the earth" (:4). But it is not just peace and prosperity because the white color mimics the scriptures of God's purposes in answer to their question, "When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3). Some refer to Jesus' Olivet Discourse as a rendition of a mini-apocalypse, and deception is a significant facet where he warns, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many" (:11) and others will fool you and "will mislead many" (:5) so, "See to it that no one misleads you" (:4). They "will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (:24).

The breaking of the seals precipitates judgment. It is referred to as God's "day of wrath" (Ro 2:5) and "day of reckoning" (Isa 2:12). It is "the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3) and "the day of trouble" (Ps 27:5). It is the "day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1) and "the great day of God" (Rev 16:14). It is a "unique day" (14:7) which is "His day" (Lk 17:24). "It is the



time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7). The seven seals represent the entire tribulation period, however, the seventh is composed of seven trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet is composed of seven bowl judgments. The first four seals take place in the first half of the tribulation period. Horses with riders appear and they represent respectively conquest, war, famine and death. The riders are not personalities per se because they represent impersonal forces and major movements which are to be interpreted together. Prophetically there was a group of four colored horses "whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth" (Zec 1:10). "These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth" (6:5). "With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses" (:2-3). Jesus described this period as "merely the beginning of birth pangs" (Mt 24:8). Then when all the seals will have been traversed the gospel will have been preached to the "whole world . . . and then the end will come" (:14).

## **Affliction**

Does the serious tribulation begin at a certain scheduled time? "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Ac 1:7). "Of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt 24:36). "You do not know which day your Lord is coming" (:42). "The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (:44). But there is a schedule, because in Jesus' situation, he recognized that "the hour has come" (Jn 17:1). Christ told the church in Philadelphia, "I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world" (Rev 3:10). He didn't say that to the other churches. When did they think that would be? There were "the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do" (1Ch 12:32). The churches had the Old Testament for reference, and by then, the gospels and Paul's letters had been circulated. Jesus said, "I am coming quickly" (Rev 3:11). Would they have interpreted that as coming within their lifetime, or did they have insights into prophetic leaps into the future? Daniel was told, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time" (Da 12:9). There is an announcement coming instructing to, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come" (Rev 14:7). "Therefore be on the alert" (Mt 24:42).

Tribulation was already present. Paul acknowledged that the Thessalonians had "received the word in much tribulation" (1Th 1:6). Jesus taught "affliction or persecution arises because of the word" (Mt 13:21). John said that he was a "partaker in the tribulation . . . because of the word of God" (Rev 1:9). Paul taught the word and cited "all of our affliction" (2Co 7:4) and asked them to "share with me in my affliction" (Php 4:14). He said "do not lose heart at my tribulation on your behalf" (Eph 3:13). They were "servants of God . . . in afflictions, in hardships, in distress" (2Co 6:4). He explained "our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our

strength, so that we despaired even of life" (1:8). He acknowledged the "great deal of affliction . . . and their deep poverty" (8:2). He cited the "persecutions and afflictions which you endure" (2Th 1:4). Nonetheless "near is the great day of the Lord" (Zep 1:14). "Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it" (Jer 30:7). "The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it? (Joel 2:11). "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (Mt 24:21). "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short" (:22). John "saw under the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Rev 6:9). "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation" (7:14). Therefore you shouldn't generalize from what was said in Revelation about being kept from "the hour of testing" (3:10).

## **False Christs**

Where does the antichrist fit into the tribulation? Jesus warned that "false Christs and false prophets will arise" (Mt 24:24). The Greek word is pseudochristos. Then there is another Greek word antichristos which John uses to say that "you heard that antichrist is coming" (1Jn 2:18). Anti here means against or opposed to Christ. It can also refer to that prophesied person in the future who appears in place of Christ as a counterfeit. Curiously in the same verse John says that "even now many antichrists (Greek plural antichristoi) have appeared" (:18). Even though the "abomination of desolation" (Mt 24:15) is predicted, a preview of antichrists is currently underway because "from this we know that it is the last hour" (1Jn 2:18). "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2Th 2:7). It is "the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1Jn 4:3). Man was created as body, soul and spirit. When you "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (:1) you are measuring the spiritual truthfulness of a person using discernment. You can also question a person and "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (:2). "False prophets" (1Jn 4:1) as well as "many deceivers have gone out into the world, [and] those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ . . . [are] the deceiver and the antichrist" (2Jn 7). These antichrist precursors embody the deceiving spirit and nature of that future representative. John cites that they were from the church saying "they went out from us" (1Jn 2:19) by deserting the congregation. What substantiates their position is that "if they had been of us, they would have remained with us" (:19). "It will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction" (2Th 2:3). John therefore advises, "Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished" (2Jn 8).

"Do not love the world nor the things in the world" (1Jn 2:15). "They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them" (4:5). "We

are from God; he who knows God listens to us" (:6). "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2Jn 9). "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son" (1Jn 2:22). Be "the one who abides in the teaching" (2Jn 9) and if anyone "does not bring this teaching, do not receive him" (:10). "Let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning" (1Jn 2:24). "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17). "You have been born again . . . through the living and abiding word of God" (1Pe 1:23). We "have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (1Jn 2:20) the truth. "By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (4:6). But "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God . . . because they are spiritually appraised" (1Co 2:14). The coming of the lawless one is "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (2Th 2:10). They "believe what is false" (:11) and will "be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (:12).

## **The Antichrist**

Jesus said that at the end of the age there would be wars, famines, earthquakes, killing, betrayal, deception, hatred and lawlessness (Mt 24:3-12). However, "It is not yet the end" (:6) but "merely the beginning of birth pangs" (:8). One sign of that period when "there will be great tribulation" (:21) is "when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (:15). "On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate" (Da 9:27). This causes horror, makes appalled, lays waste, ruins and destroys. "He will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering" (:27). A prophetic type points to this as when in 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes set up an altar in the temple to the pagan god Zeus Olympius and sacrificed a pig on it.

Jesus warned, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand" (Lk 21:20). Gabriel told Daniel, "The people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined" (Da 9:27). Jesus had said, "Not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down" (Mt 24:2) and that "your house is being left to you desolate!" (23:38). Then in 70 A.D. Titus, the son of Roman Emperor Vespasian, attacked and destroyed Jerusalem. This is a prophetic fulfillment but there is also another future application concerning the one who "will make a firm covenant with the many for one week" (Da 9:27). It is prophetic of "a beast coming out of the sea" (Rev 13:1) who is called the Antichrist. "That lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2Th 2:8). It is "even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate" (Da 9:27).

Some think that it is a picture of Christ who "will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering" (Da 9:27) because "He is the mediator of a new covenant . . . since a death has taken place for the redemption" (Heb 9:15). But this is not the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of "a covenant previously ratified by God" (Gal 3:17). Upon Jesus' sacrifice "the Sanhedrin repaired the veil and continued animal sacrifices. Isaiah prophesied God's response saying "their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments, and I will bring on them what they dread" (Isa 66:3-4). Some see progressive states of the prophecy being fulfilled. Paul refers to "the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (2Th 2:4). He makes people "to worship the first beast" (Rev 13:12) and to "cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed" (:15). Nonetheless, "the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world . . . and then the end shall come" (Mt 24:14). "The one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved" (:13).

## Letter to Churches

God gave Jesus a revelation "to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place" (Rev 1:1) which "He sent . . . by His angel" (:1). John said he heard it introduced "behind me [in] a loud voice" (:10) coming from "one like a son of man" (:13). Since it was the risen Jesus speaking it was not **an** angel (:1) because Jesus has "become as much better than the angels" (Heb 1:4). Therefore, in this sense, Jesus was being sent supernaturally to deliver the message. Angels are "ministering spirits, sent out to render service" (:14). John was to write the letter to the "seven churches" (Rev 1:11) but each section was addressed to "the angel of [that] church" (2:1). It doesn't seem logical that God would have to write a material letter to an angel because "angels in heaven continually behold the face of My father who is in heaven" (Mt 18:10). So the recipient of the letter must have had an official ministry. But obviously larger cities would have had multiple congregations and the Bible doesn't say that each city would have had only one mega-church with a single head pastor. One study Bible said "angel" could be the spiritual representation of a church. They would have comprehended this because when a knock at the door and Peter's voice was heard they rationalized, "It must be his angel" (Ac 12:15). John saw that, "In His right hand He held seven stars" (Rev 1:16). Jesus explained, "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches" (:20). The fact that Jesus is holding them signifies that "no one is able to snatch them out of My hand" (Jn 10:28) and because it is his right hand it speaks of his power and authority.

## Lampstands

On Patmos Christ communicated his revelation "to His bond-servant John" (Rev 1:1). As the last remaining apostle it would be the final encounter with the apostles in this period of Jesus' ministry. He identified himself as "the first and the last, and the living One" (:17-18). When John "turned to see the voice that was speaking" (:12) the first thing he saw was "seven golden lampstands" (:12). Christ explained that "the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (:20). John saw "in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man" (:13). Christ describes himself therefore as, "I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (:18). He paid for the church with his blood and has power and authority. He observes what happens in the church and understands why because he is "the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands" (2:1). Christ reinforced that he was "the first and last, who was dead and has come to life" (:8). Cast "all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1Pe 5:6). Jesus was addressing established, second-generation churches who were responding to their individual circumstances in different ways. Because of this covenant relationship he was able to say to each church, "I know your deeds" (Rev 2:2, 4, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15).

It is apparent that deeds are a high priority. Paul said that each person will be "recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (1Co 5:10). "Whatever good thing each one does this he will receive back from the Lord" (Eph 6:8). Does this mean that your purpose in life becomes accumulating points on your rewards card so you can receive benefits? Why not just kick back and enjoy life? In science class matter was defined as something which takes up space and has weight. Your purpose is not just to fulfill this necessity. Jesus spoke of "he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end" (Rev 2:26). Moses told Israel "Be silent and listen" (Dt 27:9). "Faith comes by hearing" (Ro 10:17). Moses continued saying, "You shall therefore obey the Lord your God" (Dt 27:10). That is how we keep "My deeds" (Rev 2:26). "Faith, if it has no works is dead" (Ja 2:17). Therefore be "zealous for" (Titus 2:14), "learn to engage in" (3:14), "be an example of" (2:7), and "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24). "Deeds that are good are quite evident" (1Ti 5:25). However, they are such that you can "profess" (Titus 1:16) something to be so but your deeds "otherwise cannot be concealed" (1Ti 5:25). God "will render to each person according to his deeds" (Ro 2:6). The Holy Spirit said "they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them" (Rev 14:13).

## Purpose

"God gave Him [the revelation] to show" (Rev 1:1). It contained "things which are" (:19) currently existing in the churches. John was instructed to "write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches" (:11). Apparently no one had come along (except

Paul who wrote letters to some churches) to give an evaluation of their condition. An elaborate vision is an unusual method but Jesus said, "I will build My church" (Mt 16:18). It demonstrates that Jesus is aware of what is happening and can communicate achievable expectations. Obedience is assumed because he suggested repentance from some of them. There were consequences because the churches had choices. Jesus did this because he said, "All authority has been given Me in heaven and on earth" (28:18). Power and authority were "brought about in Christ, when [God] raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places . . . and He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body" (Eph 1:20, 22-23). Therefore he instructed his disciples to teach them "to observe all things that I commanded you" (Mt 28:20).

The meaning of the resurrection of Christ is the same for us today as it was for the first century church. Their shortcomings are similar to ours because of human nature. Perhaps that is why Jesus asked "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Lk 18:8). But to be meaningful you have to know where you stand so you can apply yourself. "According to His great mercy [he] has caused us to be born again" (1Pe 1:3). "When we were dead . . . [he] made us alive together in Christ" (Eph 2:5) and "seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (:6). He "saved us and called us with a holy calling . . . according to His own purpose and grace" (2Ti 1:9) "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). "We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Ac 15:11). We are "saved through faith; and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). "Having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (1:13). "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Ro 8:35).

## **Position**

Is our spiritual condition mutually exclusive from our humanity? In a sense it is because "if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature" (2Co 5:17). A distinction drawn says to "be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10). That is why there is such an emphasis on he "who overcomes" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). We are not "perishing" (1Co 1:18) but "being saved" (2Co 2:15). We have an "inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1Pe 1:4). It is a process and you might wonder how you can accomplish this. Jesus said "the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (Jn 6:37). "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (10:28). We are "protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation" (1Pe 1:5). "The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2Th 3:3). "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (2Ti 4:18). "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure"

(Php 2:13). "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6).

Proceed in such a way that you do "not lose heart . . . [for] we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal 6:8-9). It can be difficult because "you will be hated by all because of My name" (Mt 10:22) and "many will fall away and will betray one another" (24:10). John, himself, "was on the island of Patmos because of . . . the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:9). Consequently Jesus cited the perseverance of the Ephesians and that they did not "tolerate evil men" (2:2). You can wear out if you're not careful. Therefore "consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you do not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:3). If you have a purpose you have a goal. Jesus told the Ephesians they "'have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary'" (Rev 2:3).

## **Perseverance**

"In hope we have been saved but . . . [it is] what we do not see" (Ro 8:24-25). Therefore it is "with perseverance we wait eagerly for it" (:25). "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing" (Rev 3:10). Paul pointed out to the Corinthians that it is "the gospel . . . in which you also stand by which you are saved" (1Co 15:1-2). But he cautioned them to "hold fast the word" (:2). Unless we know for sure we can lose focus. That is why John said "these things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1Jn 5:13). "We know that we are of God" (:19). Paul said "I know whom I have believed and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2Ti 1:12). Jesus told the Pergamum church that "'you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith'" (Rev 2:13). He told the church of Philadelphia, "'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown'" (3:11). How do you hold on and persevere? Jesus warned, "'If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up'" (Jn 15:6). He also told the Philadelphia church "'you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name'" (3:8). The key to Thyatira's success was "'your love and faith and service and perseverance'" (2:19). "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (14:12). Jesus spoke of "'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end'" (2:26). He warned the disciples that "'it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved'" (Mt 10:22). If you persevere you will overcome. Rewards for the overcomer are listed in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

## Ephesus

The first church written to was Ephesus. The city was the largest in the province, was commercially successful because of its harbor, and was free of Roman soldiers. Paul taught there for three years but idolatry was popular. The church set an example for hard work, responsibility and endurance (Rev 2:2-3). They exhibited "perseverance" (:2,3). It does not seem that they could have abandoned the love they had at first. Christ said, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (:4). It takes dedication to oppose evil and test false apostles (:2). Their motivation was "for My name's sake" (:3). The church was now decades old but it had "fallen" (:5) because it no longer did what it had previously done. Their behavior had become a way of life. It seems that their work was intellectually based but didn't come from the heart. Paul said "if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and I have all faith . . . but do not have love, I am nothing" (1Co 13:2). Jesus warned about the last days that "'because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold'" (Mt 24:12). Jesus' solution was to "remember from where you have fallen" (Rev 2:5). It does not mean just to think back to what you have forgotten. It means to always keep in mind (remembering) how you lived (what you did) "at first" (:5). The concern is comparable to "the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns" (Mt 13:22). He "hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word" (:22). Superficial preoccupation with mundane matters can take the place of being spiritually purposeful in love.

Therefore Jesus called upon them to "repent" (Rev 2:5) and that he would "remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent" (:5). The lampstand is the church itself (1:20). If Christ's presence departed then their effective ministry would disappear. There is a saying "out of sight, out of mind." In Israel "there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Then "they forsook the Lord . . . and followed other gods" (:12). Firstly Jesus had encouraged them citing their accomplishments but was now making them "sorrowful to the point of repentance . . . according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything" (2Co 7:9). Furthermore they were to change their behavior as well as their attitude. Jesus instructed to "repent and do the deeds you did at first" (Rev 2:5). He told the church at Thyatira that "'he who overcomes . . . [is] he who keeps My deeds until the end'" (:26). Paul said "that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Ac 26:20). Paul also advised that "those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men" (Titus 3:8).



## Smyrna

Smyrna was founded by Ionian Greeks who established a notable culture of literature and philosophy. It had an ideal natural harbor on the Aegean Sea. It was destroyed by the Lydians around 600 B.C. and Alexander the Great freed them two hundred years later. The city was rebuilt according to Alexander's plan with right-angled streets where the sea breeze blew down each one. It became a beautiful city with a population of 200,000 at the time of this letter. It was a center of emperor worship having a temple to Emperor Tiberius (26 A.D.). Citizens were required to burn incense there, and if they refused, could be imprisoned and killed. There was also a temple to Cybele who was the goddess of "mother earth" to both the Greeks and Romans. Much immorality was present. There was also a large temple to Jupiter where Zeus was the chief Greek and Roman deity. Jesus cited "your tribulation and your poverty" (Rev 2:9). Since the city was very prosperous it implies that there was significant economic persecution. However being in poverty does not mean that their bank accounts were zero, but that they were like Jesus who "for your sake He became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich" (2Co 8:9). That is why he explained to the church "but you are rich" (Rev 2:9). "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (Ja 2:5). John had elaborated "I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers" (3Jn 2). Paul taught that "in the ages to come He [would] show the surpassing riches of His grace" (Eph 2:7) which are the "unfathomable riches of Christ" (3:8).

Jesus was also aware of "the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not" (Rev 2:9). In Philadelphia there were those "who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie" (3:9). Jesus pointed out, "you are of your father the devil . . . for he is a liar" (Jn 8:44). Their origin was therefore labeled the "synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9, 3:9). Blasphemy is to revile someone and its seriousness is shown where "the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death" (Lev 24:16). Tribulation came from the Jews because they "instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabus" (Ac 13:50), "embittered [the Gentiles] against the brethren" (14:2), attempted "to mistreat and stone them" (:5), "stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city" (:19), and "formed a mob and set the city in an uproar" (17:5). In accordance with this behavior Jesus warned "the devil is about to cast some of you into prison" (Rev 2:10). But he encouraged them saying, "Do not fear" (:10). "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). "If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name" (1Pe 4:16).

## **Pergamum**

Pergamum was twelve miles from the coast, and after 282 B.C. became the capital of Asia Minor. There was an acropolis or citadel 1000 feet above sea level which overlooked the city. On it was a large temple to Zeus which was shaped like a throne. Jesus referred to it saying, "I know . . . where you dwell, where Satan's throne is" (Rev 2:13). A throne is a place of authority. Jesus reiterated that Pergamum was the place "where Satan dwells" (:13). Paul instructed to "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might . . . that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph 6:10-11). There is a reference to martyrs being killed and having to hold fast to Jesus' name and faith. You can slip even when you are "caught with the words of your mouth" (Pr 6:2) such as when Jesus told Peter "before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times" (Mt 26:34). Adhering to his name is important. Initially "men began to call upon [proclaim] the name of the Lord" (Ge 4:26). Furthermore, "it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered" (Joel 2:32). A person is characterized and his authority is established using his name. You are associated with someone as when the "chief priests [were given power] to bind all who call on Your name" (Ac 9:14). Official status is denoted as when Jesus prayed "while I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me" (Jn 17:12).

In addition to the Greek deity there was a temple to Emperor Augustus (29 A.D.) because the city was the administrative center of the Emperor's cult (Roma). However, it was the religious power and authority of pagan priests which challenged the church. It is believed that the Babylonian priesthood moved to Pergamum from Babylon after it was destroyed. That would have involved astrology and the occult. There was also the temple of AEsculapius who was the god of healing. This would have utilized mystical methods. However, Jesus told them it was "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (Rev 2:12). Surgically speaking "the word of God . . . [is] sharper . . . and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow" (Heb 4:12). By the Cross "He had disarmed the rulers and authorities" (Col 2:15) and "appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1Jn 3:8). He told the seventy disciples "I have given you authority . . . over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you" (Lk 10:19). He told his disciples "these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons" (Mk 16:17).

## **Teaching of Balaam**

John wrote, "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says . . . I have a few things against you" (Rev 2:12,14). It is hereby expressed since "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword" (Isa 49:2). He explained "there are some who hold the teaching of Balaam" (Rev 2:14). Women of Midian "caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel

of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor" (Num 31:16). Balaam "kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel" (Rev 2:14). He "kept" doing it repetitively. Therefore "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1Ti 4:16). Teaching is doctrine. "Speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1) for "they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires" (2Ti 4:3). "Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2Pe 2:15). "They have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam" (Jude 11).

Balaam taught them "to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality" (Rev 2:14). This came about when "Israel journeyed and camped in the plains of Moab" (Nu 22:1). Then the king of Moab sent for Balaam saying, "Please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me" (:6). "God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them'" (:12), but when Balaam persisted he said, "Go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do" (:20). However, "the angel of the Lord" (:23,24,26,31) tried to stop him. I'm sure God tries to divert us at times but we continue on. Afterwards Israelites started to have relations with Moabites. "They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their god. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel" (25:2-3). The ritual, pagan worship practices to Baal were predicated on promoting fertility where cycles of nature were personified. It was supposed to promulgate the health of herds, crops and society. That is why sexual activity was expected and they "commit acts of immorality" (Rev 2:14). Animals were "sacrificed to idols" (:14). Paul was concerned about "the eating of things sacrificed to idols" (1Co 8:4). He said "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (10:20). "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (:21). "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him . . . [therefore] flee immorality" (6:18). They were to "abstain from things sacrificed to idols . . . and from fornication" (Ac 15:29). God judged the disobedience and "those who died by the plague were 24,000" (Nu 25:9). He told Pergamum "you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Rev 2:15). To the Ephesians he said "you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (:7).

## **Thyatira**

Thyatira was a prosperous city with many trade guilds. Each had its own patron deity and there was idolatry and immorality. The guilds controlled the city's commerce, so if you didn't participate in the pagan worship, you couldn't join the union and then could not find work. The most popular god was Apollo, the sun-god, who was known to rule by force and also known to keep his followers from misfortune. There was also a temple to

Artemis-Diana, the love goddess. Then there was a temple outside the city to a sorceress and fortuneteller named Sibyl Sambathe. Jesus had a criticism of this church saying that "you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20). "Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel" (1Ki 16:29) and "he married Jezebel . . . and went to serve Baal" (:31) and "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him" (:33). Jezebel implemented Phoenician worship and had 450 prophets to Baal and 400 to Astarte at the court of Ahab. Characteristics of these Canaanite religions were degeneracy, barbarity and licentiousness. Mysticism and demonic influence were prevalent. Jehu spoke of the "harlotries . . . [and] witchcrafts" of Jezebel (2Ki 9:22). The Thyatiran Jezebel claimed prophetic inspiration from God but it is not said that she was a member of the church. However Jesus said to the church "you tolerate the woman" (Rev 2:20) and "hold this teaching" (:24) and accuses "those who commit adultery with her" (:22). He advises them to "repent of her deeds" (:22) which include "the deep things of Satan" (:24).

The perspective of this letter is of "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev 2:18). John saw that "His eyes were like a flame of fire" (1:14). Also, when John "saw heaven opened" (19:11) he said "His eyes are a flame of fire" (:12). Daniel said "his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches" (Da 10:6). It symbolizes his penetrating knowledge of man's motives and thoughts. God is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). He knows "the hearts of all men" (Ac 1:24). "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind" (Jer 17:10). Therefore, he said to this church that "all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and the hearts" (Rev 2:23). He also cautions "I will give to each one of you according to your deeds" (:22). This is the "burden" (:24) he places on them. However Thyatira's Jezebel was given "time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality" (:21). "God will bring every act to judgment" (Ecc 12:14). God's "eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer 32:19). Jesus told the churches "I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev 22:12).

## **Sardis**

Sardis was located on a narrow plateau 1,500 feet above sea level near a river and next to a mountain range. It was a strategic military stronghold and there were fertile fields nearby. It was once wealthy and known for its textile industry and wool dyeing. Pagan worship was common and their patron deity was Cybele, the mother goddess. Its excesses and immorality were well known. The city's position fostered complacency which led to being conquered.

Jesus revealed to the church in Sardis that "you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev 3:2). It seems that they were lackadaisical (languid-lacking liveliness and interest). He said, "I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God" (:2). It was not in a worldly way but in a spiritual context. In Isaiah God said "this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote" (29:13). If their deeds had been "completed" the results would have substantiated the accomplishment. Paul points out that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it" (Php 1:6). Furthermore Christ "will also confirm you to the end" (1Co 1:8). But they were oblivious to their situation and were told "you are dead, wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die" (Rev 3:2). They were "not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God" (Col 2:19). They were "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2Ti 3:5). They were "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (:7). Paul explained "while they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly" (1Th 5:3). Jesus had told them things "were about to die" (Rev 3:2). He warned "if you do not wake up, I will come as a thief" (:3). "If the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert" (Mt 24:43). "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will" (:44). "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2Pe 3:11)? Paul said they were "not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief" (1Th 5:4). "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" (:6) "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2Pe 3:14). They had a reputation of being alive. Just because you attend church it could be that you are alleged to be a Christian. However, it is "he who does the will of My Father" (Mt 7:21) who will enter heaven. Jesus will say to some who expect entry "I never knew you; depart from Me" (:23).

## **Walk in White**

As a solution Jesus advised to "remember what you have received and heard" (Rev 3:3). What they had received was "the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (Ja 1:21). To "wake up" (Rev 3:2,3) is imperative. "It is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed" (Ro 13:11). Furthermore, what you remember you are also to "keep" (Rev 3:3). This is done by laying aside "the old self" (Eph 4:22), "every encumbrance" (Heb 12:1), and "all that remains of wickedness" (Ja 1:21). "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality" (Col 3:5). "Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph 4:24) "who is being renewed to

a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col 3:10). As a result "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1Jn 1:7).

Jesus said, "You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments" (Rev 3:4). There were only some with a right relationship. God had chosen Israel as a brand from the fire (Zec 3:2). Joshua, the high priest, was "clothed with filthy garments" (:3) and the Lord said, "Remove the filthy garments from him" (:4). Then he explained, "I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes" (:4). In Revelation he explains "they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (Rev 3:4). Furthermore, "he who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments" (:5). "It was given to [the Bride of Christ] to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:8). "When [the priests] enter at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments" (Eze 44:17) for "they shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat" (:18). Sweat symbolizes human effort and Paul acknowledged that he "be found in Him, not having righteousness of my own . . . but that which is through faith in Christ" (Php 3:9). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Co 5:21). They are "clothed in white garments" (Rev 3:5). "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

## **Philadelphia**

Jesus addresses the church in Philadelphia as "He who . . . has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens" (Rev 3:7). This is from the prophecy which says "I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open" (Isa 22:22). It refers to "a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders . . . [where] there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His Kingdom" (9:6-7). This was implemented when Jesus said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:19). Notice that God orchestrates his plan. Jesus said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:19).

Keys are to doors. Jesus told them, "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut" (Rev 3:8). John noticed that something was opened to him and wrote "behold, a door standing open in heaven" (4:1). You can't see anything until the door opens. Stephen said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up" (Ac 7:56). He saw "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (:56). Jesus had said, "I am the way and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn 14:6). He also stated, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved"

(10:9). The opening is the part of the door structure that one enters through. He said, "I am the door of the sheep" (:7). "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice" (:3). Peter heard God's voice and Jesus explained it was from "My Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16:17). He continued saying, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church" (:18). Consequently by receiving the "keys of the kingdom" (:19) Peter unlocked the revelation by declaring for them to "repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Ac 2:38). Furthermore "all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43).

Philadelphia was 952 feet above sea level and was likely considered a fortress city. It was an agricultural center, manufactured textiles, and produced leather. Its location was as a gateway to the high central plateau and it was on an important trade route. Jesus said, "I have put before you an open door" (Rev 3:8). It would mean that it was a door of opportunity for spreading the gospel (1Co 16:9, 2Co 2:12, Col 4:3). It was put there because they had "a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My Name" (Rev 3:8). They had also "kept the word of My perseverance" (:9). He had said, "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance" (Mt 13:12).

## **Laodicea**

Antiochus II rebuilt the city in 250 BC and named it after his wife Laodice. Should any significance be attributed to this name? To evaluate it one should be "accurately handling the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15). You would build an interpretation "line on line" (Isa 28:10) as a mason would stretch out a line to build a wall and then raise it for the next layer. The compound word "Laodiceans" is composed of the two Greek words "laos" and "dice." The first means "people" and the second "judgment or vengeance" which transfers to English as "the people of my judgment." That first word is also a part of the noun "Nicolaitans" mentioned of Ephesus regarding its "deeds" (Rev 2:6) and Pergamos regarding its "doctrine" (2:15). The first part of that word is "nikos" which means "conquest" implying "conquering the people." Jesus spoke of the detrimental effect of the "teaching of Baalam" (:14) and those "in the same way [who] hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (:15). Little is known of the latter sect though the Greek meaning may be "rulers of the people." The doctrine may have led some people to make compromises with society wherein they rationalized they could practically function in both the church and idolatry at the same time. Their lives would have been corrupted and they would have been defeated. Some interpreters find the principle in a scripture and apply it to similar situations. Idolatry is worship of a false god instead of the true God, so if anything diverts attention from God to itself, it can be considered an idol. If someone's deeds undermine proper behavior and are deliberate then he is responsible. Jesus warned that

"the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them" (Mt 20:25). That is why Peter instructed the church elders to lead by example and not "yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge" (1Pe 5:3). So it is possible that the complacent and independent attitude of the Laodicean church is the result of it having been "conquered" by tolerating worldly methods imposed by those seeking control. The church is to be a "holy priesthood" (1Pe 2:5) and not an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

## Lukewarm

Laodicea was on the Lycus River at the junction of two fertile valleys and at the intersection of three busy trade routes. It was militarily defensible and eventually became the capital of that Roman region. It became wealthy and its banks stored the gold which was refined locally by a special process. Perhaps this is why Jesus said "'You say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'" (Rev 3:17). He instructed "'I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich" (:18). In the valley they had developed a special breed of black sheep. Also they had invented a process of weaving without using yarn and produced a popular outer garment called a "trimeta." Jesus advised for them to buy "'white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed" (:18). They had a famous medical school and it was known for its ear salve and eye ointment. However, they attributed their success to worshipping the healing God Asclepius. Jesus instructed to buy from him "'eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (:18).

Jesus begins this message with him being the "'Beginning of the creation of God" (:14). Laodicea was only six miles from Colossae and is mentioned four times in the epistle to the Colossians. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col 1:15-16). "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (:17). "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (Jn 1:3). The Laodiceans felt self-sufficient and had lost their spiritual perspective. They had become "lukewarm" (Rev 3:16) and Jesus instructed them to "'be zealous and repent" (:19). He said, "'You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (:17). They did not even realize that their communication with him had broken down and the relationship had deteriorated. He said, "'I stand at the door and knock" (:20). He had even announced his presence with "'My voice" (:20). We shouldn't be so preoccupied with our normal lives that we ignore the "upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:14). It is our responsibility to open the door (Rev 3:20). Then fellowship will be renewed and Jesus will "'come in to him and dine with him" (:20).



# The Kingdom of God

## Eyewitnesses

In a court proceeding secondary or incidental evidence is not nearly as incriminating as firsthand testimony. In one case they "were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2Pe 1:16) when they "heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (:18). Christ "received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him" (:17). They concluded that "we have the prophetic word made more sure" (:19) and "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will" (:21). Peter therefore concludes that "we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (:16). Tales are fictitious stories. "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2Jn 9). They "from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Lk 1:2). John said "we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1Jn 1:2). "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (:5). Luke reports that "the things accomplished among us . . . were handed down to us" (Lk 1:1-2) in conjunction with "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also" (1Jn 1:3). It is "what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life" (:1).

These apostles felt responsible to communicate what they had experienced and learned. John stated "these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete" (1Jn 1:4). Peter relates it is the "second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder" (2Pe 3:1). "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1Jn 5:13). Luke acknowledged that "many have undertaken to compile an account" (Lk 1:1) of these things and he, himself, "investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write [it] out for you in consecutive order" (:3) "so you may know the exact truth" (:4). As long as you are "certain . . . [and] practice these things . . . the entrance into the eternal kingdom . . . will be abundantly supplied to you" (2Pe 1:10-11). "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true" (1Jn 5:20). However, not everyone agrees with this teaching. "We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us" (1Jn 4:6). John found only "some of your children walking in the truth" (2Jn 4) "as we have received commandment to do from the Father" (:4). He then stated "I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is how you are walking in truth" (3Jn 3).

## Kingdom at Hand

"The word of God came to John" (Lk 3:2) and he began "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (:3). Consequently "all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ" (:15). Jews were cognizant of this as Simeon was "looking for the consolation of Israel" (2:25) and Anna "continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (:38). "With many exhortations he preached the gospel to the people" (3:18) intimating that "all flesh will see the salvation of God" (:6) and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2). Jesus reminded them that by John "the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it" (Lk 16:16). Jesus, himself, "began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Mt 4:17). He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43). He was "teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel" (Mt 4:23). The "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations" (24:14). This will result in an obedience in accordance with the prayer, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10). "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15).

"The people were in a state of expectation" (Lk 3:15) and even the apostles asked, "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Ac 1:6). After all, for forty days Jesus had been "speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God" (:3). Even the Pharisees had questions and Jesus answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed" (Lk 17:20). He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36) and "as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (:36) meaning that, as it stands, it is not a threat to the government. But rather "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:21). It is implemented from the inside out because "He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev 1:6). "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (5:10). It was furthered "when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God" (Ac 8:12). It was promulgated for two years when Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:30-31).

## Kingdom is Near

Historically a king has been the focus of power and authority over a territory. He reigns because what he decides has to be obeyed since he has the ability to enforce his edicts. God told them he was the "Creator of Israel, your King" (Isa 43:15). They were to "remember also your Creator" (Ecc 12:1). There doesn't automatically have to be a king for "in those days there was no king in Israel" (Jdg 18:1). Then God told Samuel

“they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them” (1Sa 8:7). God warned them of how a king would take advantage of them (:11-17) but they "refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No, but there will be a king over us'" (:19). An example of man's dominion is Nimrod and "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel" (Ge 10:10) or Babylon. Satan "showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time" (Lk 4:5) and said “it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (:6). However, "the kingdom is the Lord's and He rules over the nations" (Ps 22:28). "He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves" (66:7). It is "the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (145:12-13).

The kingdom of God seems all-encompassing so how is it appropriated? Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is in your midst” (Lk 17:21) which means “Do not go away” (:23) since it “is not coming with signs to be observed” (:20). It is near because it “is at hand” (Mt 4:17). Jesus told them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables” (Mk 4:11). It is a mystery because another translation of Luke 17:21 is that the kingdom is within you, and being inside (not outside), means that you understand. It is "His kingdom" (2Ti 4:1) since Jesus referred to it as “My kingdom” (Lk 22:30). It is the "kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph 5:5) and will become “the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Rev 12:15). As representatives "He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing" (Lk 9:2). They were to say, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (10:9). "All the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all" (6:19). He told the Pharisees, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12:28).

## **Enter the Kingdom**

Peter put it into perspective referring to "I am in this earthly dwelling" (2Pe 1:13) and that the "laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent" (:14). "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2Co 5:1). Paul also remarked he would "prefer rather to be absent from the body and be at home with the Lord" (:8). There is an "entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord" (2Pe 1:11). It was explained that Jesus “has been taken from you into heaven” (Ac 1:11). Paul anticipated that the "Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (2Ti 4:18).

Jesus told them, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20). “Not everyone who says

to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (7:21). Again he emphasized, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter" (:5). By water it means "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you . . . from all your idols" (Eze 36:25). Christ "gave Himself up for her [the church] . . . having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:25-26). "He saved us . . . according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). "Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Is being there simply a matter of location? A compromise mentioned by Jesus is that "there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power" (Mk 9:1).

Jesus told the apostles, "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you" (Lk 22:29). "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:19). Jesus told the disciples, "Let the children alone . . . for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (19:14). "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). Even a scribe was getting close, for "when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'" (Mk 12:34). The King said, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34).

## **Inherit the Kingdom**

Jesus' disciples asked, "When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Mt 24:3). One sign is "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (:7). Nations are countries or ethnicities but kingdoms are relms that are ruled over and not necessarily limited to countries. Nonetheless "you will be hated by all nations because of My name" (:9). "They will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you" (:9). "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (:12). It seems that this means more than just navigating through circumstances so you don't get killed. The gospel of the kingdom is to be preached (:14). It is a process to be prayed for saying, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10). The gospel is the "good news" of the kingdom representing the kingdom itself. It is a "testimony to all the nations" (:14) which is followed by "the end" (:14). Jesus pointed out, "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk 10:25). Peter then cited, "We have left everything and followed You" (:28), but if you endure to the end (Mt 24:12), you will receive "a hundred times as much . . . and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mk 10:30). However, Jesus warned the Pharisees, "Because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those

who are entering to go in" (Mt 24:13) "it shall be charged against this generation" (Lk 11:51).

Paul encouraged the Colossians to give "thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light" (Col 1:12). The king said to them, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34). They "through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb 6:12). "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force" (Mt 11:12). It denotes to catch away or pluck something by force suddenly exercised. A person must deliberately decide and act upon it. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1Co 6:9). You don't qualify if you are unjust or wicked. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (15:5). "The deeds of the flesh are evident" (Gal 5:19). "Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (:21). "No immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph 5:5). "We have obtained an inheritance" (1:11) which is "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (:18). It is "the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15) and "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1Pe 1:4).

## **Forfeited the Kingdom**

Will Israel inherit the kingdom of God? God had specifically chosen them as he "rejected" (Ps 78:67) some and "did not choose" (:67) others. He made a covenant with them telling Moses to say, "If you indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples for all the earth is Mine" (Ex 19:5). "Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth" (Isa 54:5). He "chose the tribe of Judah" (Ps 78:68) and "also chose David His servant" (:70). God's purpose was to "shepherd Jacob His people" (:71) "according to the integrity of His heart" (:72). "You shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). Balaam prophesied, "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!" (:5). "He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him?" (:9).

However, Israel broke the covenant by committing spiritual adultery because "she was a harlot there" (Jer 3:6). Israel had been "faithless" (:6) and "her treacherous sister Judah saw it" (:7). God's response was, "You adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband! Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them!" (Eze 16:32-33). He said, "I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant" (:59). "You were sold for your iniquities, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away" (Isa 50:1). "I

saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce" (Jer 3:8). "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (Hos 2:2). Furthermore, "the former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled" (Dt 24:4). Therefore, the ten northern tribes of Israel were taken captive by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. after which they were dispersed into most of the known world never to return to their land.

In addition, "Her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also" (Jer 3:8) and "did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception" (:18). Consequently in 606 B.C. the southern kingdom was taken into captivity. Then after seventy years the exiles were permitted to return where they resumed the name of Israel as the designation for their nation. "Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you . . . and will establish an everlasting covenant with you" (Eze 16:60). It would be "so that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation" (:63). "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days" (Hos 3:5).

## **Restore the Kingdom**

Paul addresses Israel's destiny asking, "God has not rejected His people, has He?" (Ro 11:1). He answers "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (:2). Paul then reveals that "at the present time [there is] a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (:5). Then he asks "if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (:15). They again will be branches of the "rich root of the olive tree" (:17). Therefore "if they do not continue in their unbelief, [they] will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (:23). He then reveals a "mystery" (:25) that "all Israel will be saved" (:26). At that time they were enemies of the gospel (:28) but by "God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (:28-29). In verse 27 he quotes a prophecy proving God's intention from Isaiah 59:20 saying, "A redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob." It pertains to a covenant saying, "As for Me, this is My covenant with them" (:20). It involves "My Spirit which is upon you" (:21) and that God's words "shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the . . . mouth of your offspring's offspring . . . from now and forever" (:21).

It coincides with the prophesy saying, "Behold, days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer 31:31). However, it will "not [be] like the covenant I made with their fathers" (:31). Nonetheless, that covenant is significant saying, "To your descendants I have given this land" (Ge 15:18), "the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting

possession; and I will be their God" (17:8). It will be fulfilled "when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah . . . [and] will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it" (Jer 30:3). "In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance" (3:18). "I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone . . . and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation . . . and they will no longer be two nations" (Eze 37:21-22). "I will . . . cleanse them . . . and they will be My people, and I will be their God" (:23).

They will proclaim, "O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel" (Jer 31:7). "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth" (:8). "At the time when I gather you together; indeed I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore our fortunes before your eyes" (Zep 3:20). "That day is great, there is none like it" (Jer 30:7). "It is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it" (:7). However, it will be difficult, for "I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace" (:5). "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, 'declares the Lord, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people'" (Jer 31:33).

## **A Remnant will Return**

"That day is great, there will be none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7). It is said to be the time of the Great Tribulation. They will say, "Why has the Lord done thus to this land?" (Dt 29:24) and the reply will be, "Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord . . . [and] went and served other gods" (:25-26). "The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is to this day" (:28). "A destruction is determined" (Isa 10:22). "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand" (14:24). "I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle" (Zec 14:2). However, "in a little while My indignation against you will be spent" (Isa 10:25). "Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations" (Zec 14:3). "O Lord, save Your people, the remnant of Israel" (Jer 31:7). There will be "in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped" (Isa 10:20). "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the mighty God" (:21) for "only a remnant within them will return" (:22). "It will happen on that day that the Lord will recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people" (Isa 11:11). "He will assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth; (:12). "The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land . . . and it will be in the day when the Lord gives you rest" (14:1,3). "I bring near My righteousness,

it is not far off; and my salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, and My glory for Israel" (46:13-14).

“It shall be when all these things have come upon you . . . and you call them to mind . . . and you return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and soul . . . then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity . . . and will gather you again from all the peoples" (Dt 30:1,2,3). He “will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed and you shall possess it" (:5). Also He “will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord . . . so that you may live" (:6). It will be the "favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa 61:2). "They will rebuild the ancient ruins" (:4) and "be called the priests of the Lord" (:6). "Instead of your shame you will have a double portion" (:7) and "I will faithfully give them their recompense" (:8) and "make an everlasting covenant with them"(:8). This is not accomplished without a struggle. "I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Rev 19:19). There was a "white horse and He who sat on it" (:11) and "armies which are in heaven . . . were following Him on white horses" (:14). "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will endure forever" (Da 2:44).

## **Kingdom of Heaven**

Revelation 20:1-6 presents the millennium and it is a time of peace because Satan is bound for a thousand years (:2). It is a period of theocratic government because they reigned with Christ for a thousand years (:4,6). Jesus said, “In the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt 19:28). John saw "thrones and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them" (Rev 20:4). "In the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains . . . and all the nations will stream to it" (Isa 2:2). "Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him" (40:10). "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps 103:19). "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations" (145:13). In the millennium (and afterwards) you could say that Christ fulfills the functions of the executive, legislative, and judicial functions of government. "For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our King" (33:22).

The Messianic kingdom was prophesied with, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2Sa 7:16). "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace; on the throne of David and



over his kingdom" (Isa 9:7). It is because "a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders" (:6). It is a matter of authority, power, dominion and rule. "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations" (Ps 22:28). "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" (Isa 61:1) "to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God" (:2). "His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zec 9:10). "He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples" (Isa 2:4). "With righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth" (11:4). "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet" (Isa 62:1). "The law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (2:3). The eventuality is that "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord" (Rev 11:15). But there was a tension between the current and future realities of the kingdom. We know that scripture teaches that the kingdom is already present because John said he was a "fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus" (Rev 1:9). Paul stated, "He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and translated us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Jesus explained, "When you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near . . . [and] this generation will not pass away until all things take place" (Lk 21:31-32).

### **Kingdom is Lord's**

Paul spoke of Christ "who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom" (2Ti 4:1). "The kingdom is the Lord's" (Ps 22:28) and "His sovereignty rules over all" (103:19). His authority "rules over" (22:28) and "keep[s] watch on the nations" (66:7). His power is seen through his "mighty acts" (145:12) and "He rules by His might forever" (66:7). It is an "everlasting kingdom" (145:13) administered from "His throne in the heavens" (103:19). His "dominion endures throughout all generations" (145:13). This rule is over creation in general and man in particular. But there is also a future application in a messianic sense. Christ came and "the government will rest on His shoulders" (Isa 9:6) and "there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace" (:7). It will be "on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness" (:7). They brought David to Samuel and God said, "Anoint him; for this is he" (1Sa 16:12). Samuel did so and "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (:13). They said, "The Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel'" (2Sa 5:2).

"The Lord has sworn to David . . . of the fruit of your body I will set upon the throne" (Ps 132:11). "One will go forth for Me to be ruler of Israel" (Micah 5:2). "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king" (Jer 23:5). "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (Jn 7:42). "Of all my sons . . . He has chosen my son Solomon

to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel" (1Ch 28:5). "Soloman has even taken his seat on the throne of the kingdom" (1Ki 1:46) and God told him, "I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David" (2Ch 7:18). Paul stated that Christ "was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (Ro 1:3). Jesus, himself, cited the importance of this continuity saying, "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright and morning star" (Rev 22:16). He asks the Pharisees, "How does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,'" (Mt 22:43) for "if David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" (:45). The reference is "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (Ps 110:1). Jesus was proving that he was the Messiah and "no one was able to answer Him a word" (Mt 22:46).

Prophetically it is "when He sits on the throne of His kingdom" (Dt 17:18). Nathan prophesied, "Your throne shall be established forever" (2Sa 7:16). "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom" (Isa 9:7). It was according to what the angel told Mary that Jesus "will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Lk 1:32). Daniel predicted that "His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Da :27). The angel explained regarding Jesus' birth that "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Lk 1:33). "Having been exalted to the right hand of God . . . [he] received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Ac 2:33). Being exalted would be occupying a "supreme place." "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18). "All things that the Father has are Mine" (Jn 16:15).